SUCCESSFUL RELOCATION OF AN OSPREY NEST AFTER EGG-LAYING

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Abstract—Osprey numbers in New York State have increased dramatically in recent years. Ospreys are attracted to anthropogenic structures and frequently nest on power poles. With the increase in population has come a corresponding increase in nest fires, Osprey mortality and power outages. Utilities regularly remove nests from high risk locations outside of the breeding season. In the spring of 2013 a nest with eggs was relocated. It was the first time this had been attempted; a chick was hatched and successfully fledged from the nest.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), have historically nested in New York State (NYS) (Eaton 1914). These large fish-eating hawks breed in North America and typically winter in Central and South America (Martell et al. 2001).

There are two main breeding areas in NYS: the southeastern section, primarily Long Island, and the Adirondack-St. Lawrence Valley section. These areas account for the majority of the state's nest records according to *The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State* (Nye 2008).

Osprey numbers declined drastically in NYS throughout the mid-1900s, primarily as a result of dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) use. Since its ban in 1972, Osprey numbers have increased greatly (Fig. 1).

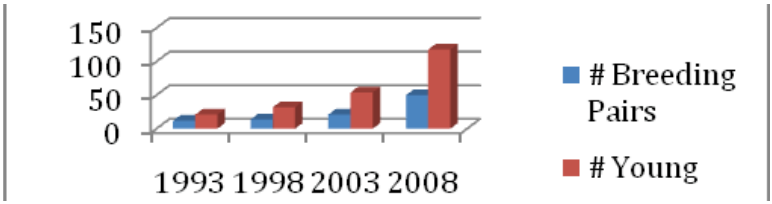

Figure 1. Osprey productivity in northwestern New York, 1993-2008.

Ospreys nest in trees, but they are also attracted to man-made structures including buildings, towers, buoys and utility poles. The most common land-based structures selected by Ospreys for nest construction are utility poles (Poole et al. 2002). Poles are abundant and Ospreys find them suitable for supporting their large stick nests and providing an excellent vantage.

Between the years of 2001 and 2008, 60% of Osprey nests in northwestern NYS were built on anthropogenic structures (Town 2009). By 2008 only 20% of the nests found in the region were located in trees (Town, unpubl. data). Although 2008 was the final year of decades of annual breeding and productivity surveys (started in 1969) by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) staff, continuing interactions and unofficial monitoring support the observation that both the population and the percentage of nests on artificial structures continues to increase.

With the increase in the number of Osprey nests found on power poles there is a corresponding increase in the number of nest fires and loss of chicks. When sticks or other nesting materials cross power lines, fires or explosions occur resulting in power outages and electrocuted birds.

Osprey are persistent in their nest building efforts and show a great deal of fidelity to their nest sites. They typically return to this region in early April and begin new nest construction or decorate existing nests shortly thereafter.

NYS DEC has entered into agreements with government agencies and utilities that define dates and activities governing nest removal and relocation. As a result of these cooperative agreements numerous nests have been relocated to platforms (stand alone or pole mounted), or structures have been modified to increase the distance between the nest and electrical components. In all cases (100%) birds have been successfully relocated to platforms when they were constructed at the same or higher elevation and the original nest or nesting materials gathered by humans were placed on top of the platform. DEC constructs and provides platforms to utilities as needed. Other than in emergency situations, nests are only moved outside of the breeding season.

In the 2013 breeding season, Ospreys persisted in their attempts to construct a nest on a National Grid (NG) power pole where, due to the wiring configuration, there was a very high risk of a nest fire and electrocution of the birds. This location had experienced a power outage and nest fire in the past, but the birds rebuilt the nest despite NG's efforts to discourage them. A visit to the site on 3 May revealed that eggs were present in the nest.

On 6 May DEC wildlife staff joined NG crews on site. One Osprey was observed incubating and another flew in to the nest as NG cut power to the pole and two bucket trucks moved into place on either side of it (Fig. 2a). As the buckets moved closer, the adults left the nest. Linemen in the buckets lifted the nest from the pole using "hot sticks". The nest was lashed securely to the sticks and then lifted off from the top of the pole and set onto a platform. The platform had been previously bolted onto a fiberglass pole extension. The pole extension

Figure 2. (a) Established nest (top); (b) Raising nest (middle); (c) Osprey return (bottom).

and platform were supported by a third truck. This truck then raised the adaptive structure above the power pole (Fig. 2b) and guided by the linemen, eased it onto the top of the pole where it was bolted into place.

From the time the trucks set up on site until the time they departed, approximately 50 min elapsed. The adult Ospreys remained in the area, alternately circling or perching in trees near the nest. Within five minutes of the trucks moving away from the pole, an adult was back on the nest (Fig. 2c). The linemen reported that the eggs were covered with mossy vegetation and only partially visible during the move. It was a cool, windy day, but sunny, with temperatures steady around 12.8 °C.

On 11 June 2013 the nest was visited by wildlife staff, and it was determined that one or more eggs had hatched. An adult was perched at the side of the nest tending the chick(s) and movement was detected in the nest below.

Subsequent visits conducted during the breeding season documented the fledging of a single chick from the relocated nest. This was the first time that an attempt was made to move a nest with eggs and it proved to be successful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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